

3rd Sunday of Lent - A
Exodus 17:3-7;
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8;
Luke 4:5-42
Little Flower - 3/19/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel and the Gospels for the next two Sundays come from John's Gospel. One of the opening reflections in this year's *Little Black Book* caught my attention. It made the point that St. John's Gospel is very different from the other Gospels. In John's Gospel, Jesus does not speak in parables and short sayings but in long discourses. Also, in John's Gospel, Jesus does not primarily speak to crowds or groups but to individuals. In John's Gospel, Jesus has dramatic personal encounters with individuals.

Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have emphasized that our faith needs to be rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus. Christian faith is not primarily believing in doctrines, celebrating Liturgy, or keeping commandments. We are saved by our faith in a person, the person of Jesus Christ, who, as Paul wrote, died for us.

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Pope Francis constantly challenges us to go out to the marginalized. This was precisely what Jesus did in today's Gospel. Everything about this encounter was counter-cultural. When Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water, the woman was shocked: "*For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.*" When the disciples returned, they "*were amazed that he was talking with a woman...*" Not only that, the woman had had five husbands.

In this encounter, Jesus revealed himself to her as the Messiah, the only time in John's Gospel that he directly affirmed his identity. He also revealed her to herself when she admitted she had no husband. However, not only did her encounter with Jesus profoundly affect her, she became an evangelizer. She went into the town and invited the people to come to Jesus telling them that he had told her everything she had ever done and suggesting that he might be the Christ. We are told that many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of her testimony. All of the recent Popes have challenged us to evangelize and re-evangelize ourselves and others, especially those at the margins. This story offers a pattern for our own lives. Jesus is always reaching out to us, often through others. When we encounter him in the depths of our hearts, he reveals us to ourselves, and we are moved to share the good news with others.

Of course, the over-arching theme of today's readings is water. In the Sinai desert, the Israelites grumbled against Moses because they had no water, so God provided water from a rock. We know that water, especially in the desert, means the difference between life and death. In today's Gospel, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water but promised her living water that would bring her eternal life. Choosing water for baptism, Jesus emphatically proclaimed that just as physical water is essential to physical life, the waters of baptism are essential for eternal life. This weekend our Elect begin their scrutinies in preparation for their baptism at the Easter Vigil.

My brothers and sisters, there is one other theme that leaps out at us in today's second reading. Paul wrote, "*But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*" Please note that it does not say that God proved his love for us in the past but that God proves his love for us in the present. In other words, Christ's death in the past proves God's love for us in the present. If we are ever tempted to believe that God does not love us, especially when we have sinned, this verse powerfully reminds us that God loves us no matter what. God's love for us is the one constant in our lives, the one unconditional love on which we can always count.